John Lennon

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I'M STEPPING OUT
SLEEPLESS NIGHT
I DON'T WANNA FACE IT
DON'T BE SCARED
NOBODY TOLD ME
O' SANITY
BORROWED TIME
YOUR HANDS
(FORGIVE ME) MY LITTLE FLOWER PRINCESS
LET ME COUNT THE WAYS
GROW OLD WITH ME
YOU'RE THE ONE

Yoko says "*Milk And Honey*... John thought of the album title *Double Fantasy*. I thought of *Milk And Honey* for the next album. He liked that. People who wish to immigrate to USA, dream of America, 'the land of milk and honey'. But also, in the Scripture, the land of milk and honey is where you go after you die, as a promised land. So it's very strange that I thought of that title. Almost scary – like somebody up there told me to call the next album *Milk And Honey*."

"And what about John's songs in it: 'I'm Stepping Out', 'I Don't Wanna Face It', 'Nobody Told Me', Borrowed Time'? John decided those titles. And the contents of the songs do not necessarily have to do with his passing. But still it's eery. Even the message of 'Grow Old With Me' could be interpreted in many ways to be his final wish. However, our fate was hidden from us, totally."

Its cover artwork suggests a sequel to *Double Fantasy* – their respective photographs of John and Yoko look separated by mere moments (as indeed they were). Yet, for us, the albums are divided by the widest gulf we could possibly imagine – the death of John, which occurred in between.

Maybe for this reason, *Milk And Honey* has always seemed an orphan among John Lennon's recordings. It was the first posthumous release of unheard material, appearing some three years after his death. His own contributions to the album were never signed off by John himself. Like *Double Fantasy*, the record is structured as a "Heart Play", or dialogue, of his songs and Yoko's. But he was not there to help her assemble that particular conversation. With one or two notable exceptions, he was not familiar with Yoko's tracks, at least not in their finished form.

And yet, *Milk And Honey* is a great John and

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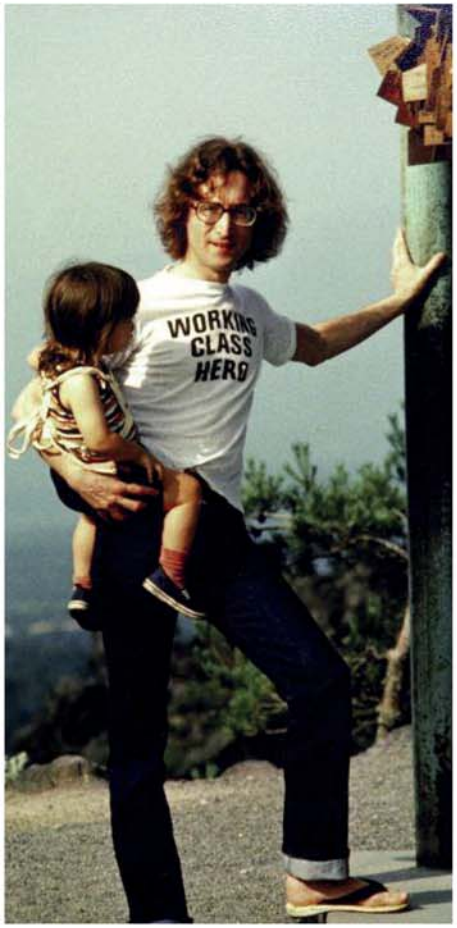
Yoko record. It fully deserves its place in the tradition of *Double Fantasy* or their early "avant garde" releases or any of the towering songs their names are jointly engraved upon, from 'Happy Xmas (War Is Over)' to 'Woman Is The Nigger Of The World'. We know that John was looking forward to a follow-up, to be called *Milk And Honey*, and that he believed he already had a lot of material. We can only speculate how closely it would have resembled the album we know, but there is not the slightest doubt that *Milk And Honey* is true to Lennon's spirit. We should open our ears and welcome it.

For her part, his wife and artistic partner Yoko Ono has never regarded *Milk And Honey* as fundamentally separate from *Double Fantasy*: "We went into recording on August 4th 1980. We recorded all the basic tracks for *Double Fantasy* and *Milk And Honey*. John knew all my songs in *Milk And Honey*, except for 'You're The One', which I wrote after John's passing as a tribute to him. We tried 'Sleepless Night', 'O' Sanity' and 'Let Me Count The Ways' at the *Double Fantasy* Sessions. With 'Let Me Count The Ways', I played it first to him over the phone, when he was in Bermuda. Well, that's another story."



John Lennon

But was the "dialogue" of *Milk And Honey* a challenge to construct, given John's absence?

"I didn't feel that way. Since, we both had a say in how the dialogue should be in *Double Fantasy*." says Yoko today, "And with *Milk And Honey*, the thing was already there."

As well as comprising a clutch of first-rate songs, *Milk And Honey* is another compelling (and candid) narrative of the final five years in John's life. Whatever else it may be, *Milk And Honey* is not a requiem album. In 'I'm Stepping Out' we hear the same mischievous John we might recognise from *A Hard Day's Night*, revelling in a night of escapist fun. (And in Yoko's fiercely physical 'Sleepless Night' we hear a kindred spirit.) His 'I Don't Wanna Face It' is a wittily unsparing exercise in self-criticism (gently countered by Yoko's song of reassurance, 'Don't Be Scared'). And 'Nobody Told Me' is a glimpse into the occasional frustrations of his existence.

Not for the first time in his work, John owns up to his own shortcomings as a husband, this time in '(Forgive Me) My Little Flower Princess'. But the tropically mellow 'Borrowed Time' suggest a man who is, in the last anaylsis, at peace with himself and enjoying his maturity. For her part, Yoko complements his self-portraits beautifully, with reflections on doubt ('O' Sanity'), eroticism ('Your Hands') and the poignantly romantic 'You're The One'.

At the very heart of *Milk And Honey*, however, are two extraordinary songs. Yoko's 'Let Me Count The Ways' and John's 'Grow Old With Me' were inspired by the Victorian poets Robert Browning and his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning, with whom the Lennons felt a deep affinity. These numbers were written for *Double Fantasy*, when John was on holiday in Bermuda and Yoko was in New York, recorded onto cassette, but then set aside for the next album. Now they sit together in the closing stages of *Milk And Honey*, perfect companion pieces. They hold the record in some place out of chronological time, eternally hopeful.

The sad irony of 'Grow Old With Me' need not be laboured. John wished, says Yoko, that the song might one day be a standard – performed, perhaps, at weddings. It deserves no less. As with John's other cuts on *Milk And Honey*, the fact that he could not re-visit his original version of 'Grow Old With Me' is really no problem at all. As matters stand, his vocal has the natural intimacy that further studio treatment might have obscured.

Though *Milk And Honey* was, of necessity, a posthumous album, it is not a memorial. Its tone is only momentarily elegiac. Several songs are by turns rowdy, optimistic, comic and frankly sensual. To Yoko Ono fell the task of presenting John's final work in a properly coherent setting, in line with the plans they had already made for the record after *Double Fantasy*, and his complex personality is superbly captured. Decades have now passed since *Milk And Honey* was conceived, but our fascination with this extraordinary man has not diminished. His songs do not lose their power to move, excite or enlighten us.

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Milk And Honey
A Heart Play
by John Lennon and Yoko Ono

Produced by John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Guitars: John Lennon, Hugh McCracken, Earl Slick, John Tropea, Elliot Randall, Steve Love. Bass Guitar: Tony Levin, Neil Jason, Wayne Pedziwiatr. Drums: Andy Newmark, Yogi Horton, Allan Schwartzberg. Piano: George Small, Paul Griffin. Percussion. Arthur Jenkins, Jr., Jimmy Maelen. Synthesizers: Pete Cannarozzi, Ed Walsh. Baritone Sax: Howard Johnson. Solo Vocals: John Lennon, Yoko Ono. Background Vocals: Gordon Grody, Kurt Yahjian, Carlos Alomar, Billy and Bob Alessi, Pete Thom. Chief Engineers: Jon Smith, Michael Barbiero. Remix Engineers: Michael Barbiero, Steve Thompson (disco remix). Editing Engineers: Michael Barbiero, Paul Stubblebine. Assistant Engineers: Alec Head, Ollie Cotton, John Davenport, Scott James, Fin Hunt. Mastering Engineer: Greg Calbi. Studios: Hit Factory, New York

A and R Studios, New York, The Automatt, San Francisco, Sterling Sound, New York. Art Direction: Yoko Ono. Artwork: Bill Levy/ Bob Heimall

Cover photography: Kishin Shinoyama

"Grow Old With Me", (John Lennon/ Vocal, Piano and Rhythm Box) and "Let Me Count The Ways", (Yoko Ono/ Vocal and Piano) are from the original cassette recordings by John and Yoko

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Remaster Project Production
Producer: Yoko Ono.
Project Co-ordinator: Allan Rouse.
Remaster Engineers: Paul Hicks, Sean Magee. Audio Restoration: Simon Gibson. Remastered at Abbey Road Studios, London, England, 2010

Sleeve notes by Paul Du Noyer.
Additional photography: Allan Tannenbaum, Nishi F. Saimaru, Lilo Raymond, Jack Mitchell, Kishin Shinoyama, Lenono Photo Archive

Art direction by Yoko Ono. Design by Peacock. Artwork Co-ordinator: Karla Merrifield. Photo research: Xilonen Oreshnick. Project management by Timothy Ryan, Jane Ventom, Kris Perera and Guy Hayden

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Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in his hand
Who saith 'a whole I planned,
Youth shows but half: trust God:
See all nor be afraid!
Robert Browning

How do I love thee?
Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth
and breadth and height
My soul can reach,
when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace,
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun
and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive
for right:
I love thee purely, as they turn
from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my
childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed
to lose
With my lost saints, I love thee
with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!
And, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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